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 - Opinion
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- Northwest Edition
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- Features
- Columnists
- Entertainment
- Homefinder
- Weather
- Archive
- Calendar 2008
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- Shopping Directory

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- Jobs
- Training
- Dating
- Casino
- Bingo
- Reader Offers
- Diners' Club

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- RSS
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[Home](#) > [News](#) > [Politics](#)

Politics

SF denies forcing McCartney sister to close cancer unit

Tuesday, November 20, 2007

By Margaret Canning and Claire Regan

Sinn Fein last night refuted claims that a party member allegedly forced a sister of IRA murder victim Robert McCartney to close down a mobile cervical cancer screening unit she was operating in the area he was killed.

South Belfast MLA Alex Maskey was answering allegations made by DUP MP Sammy Wilson in Stormont yesterday that it was a Sinn Fein figure who confronted Gemma McCartney when she was working on the unit in the Markets area of the city last Monday.

And last night the local health trust said it was investigating the matter.

Ms McCartney, a community nurse with 18 years experience, was one of two health professionals operating the mobile screening unit.

The children's nurse told the Belfast Telegraph she offered her services to a colleague who was short staffed on a unit giving advice on cervical cancer.

"When my colleague said our first stop would be the Markets I felt perfectly fine because as a community nurse I am out in all areas," she said.

"Women were coming on the bus all morning for advice and there was a man who was on and off the bus as well.

"But after lunch the man came to my colleague and said the women who had afternoon appointments had cancelled because I was a 'threat to the women's confidentiality'.

"He was telling us to get out because of who I am, though he didn't recognise me at first.

"He spat at my side. He was quite aggressive," she added.

"We had a list of women to see but had no option but to leave. We took the bus back to the depot. This is fascism.

Alex Maskey said: "To set the record straight there was no member of Sinn Fein involved in any way, shape or form. It is disgraceful that anyone should seek to exploit this valuable community service to score cheap political points."

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